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SUBJECT Contra Aid and Alleged Drug Smuggling

DAN RATHER: For the past several years the Reagan Administration has been involved in the expensive, sophisticated and highly publicized campaign, it says, to stamp out drug smuggling. But there've been increasing charges that the United States government, itself, may have actually helped bring drugs into this country as part of the secret effort to supply arms and perhaps money to the Nicaraguan rebels, the contras.

Correspondent Jane Wallace has been investigating this story for the CBS News magazine, "West 57th."

Jane.

J JANE WALLACE: Thank you, Dan.

We all knew there was a secret weapons' network to supply the contras. The Tower Commission confirms that. What's news is that some of those who flew guns down to the contras are claiming that they brought drugs back to the United States to raise untraceable cash for the contra war. All of this was part of an arrangement that included former and current CIA operatives.

Mike Toliver is a pilot whose principal occupation has been smuggling drugs. He's currently in federal prison on a drug charge unrelated to his flights for the contras. He says he was approached in 1985 and the arrangement was clear from the start.

P MIKE TOLIVER: We could bring back our own cargo. They would arrange it. Or, we could bring back their cargo without ever having to worry about interception, arrest, anything like this; that everything was taken care of.

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WALLACE: What kind of cargo were you talking about?

TOLIVER: Drugs.

WALLACE: What kind of drugs?

TOLIVER: Whatever you wanted, marijuana or cocaine.

WALLACE: Whatever you want to come back with, fine, we can make sure you don't get hit by Customs....

TOLIVER: We can make sure. It was my understanding that they would make sure we wouldn't get caught. They would provide not only the cargo, but the landing areas, crews, everything.

WALLACE: For a drug run?

TOLIVER: Yeah.

WALLACE: They would also provide the drugs if you wanted?

TOLIVER: Absolutely. Which indeed they did.

WALLACE: Toliver says he had two meetings with this man, CIA veteran Rafael Quintero.

Then in March of 1986, he says he flew 14 tons of weapons down to Honduras to this contra resupply base set up by the CIA.

What kind of cargo were you bringing back?

TOLIVER: Twenty-five thousand and change of pot.

WALLACE: Twenty-five thousand pounds of pot?

TOLIVER: Yes. Marijuana. Same plane.

WALLACE: And the same people you believe set you up with the arms...

TOLIVER: Exactly. Oh, of course....

WALLACE: ...also set you up the 25....

TOLIVER: Sure.

WALLACE: Twenty-five thousands pounds of pot?

TOLIVER: And change, yeah. That's what they --

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the piece of paper they gave me said twenty-five, I think, three-sixty.

WALLACE: So what do you do with that 25,000 pounds of pot?

TOLIVER: We take off from Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and we leave.

WALLACE: To?

TOLIVER: South Florida.

WALLACE: Where in south Florida?

TOLIVER: We landed at Homestead.

WALLACE: Homestead?

TOLIVER: Homestead Air Force Base.

WALLACE: You brought 25,000 pounds of marijuana and landed it at Homestead Air Force Base?

TOLIVER: That's correct.

WALLACE: This is the plane Toliver says he used. The plane traces to a company that had a State Department contract to fly humanitarian supplies to the contras at the same time Toliver made his flight. The Air Force says it has no record of the flight.

Were you surprised you were going to land all this pot at an Air Force base?

TOLIVER: Well, I was a little taken aback, to be honest with you. I was somewhat concerned about it. I figured it was a set up. They were going to, you know -- or it was a DEA bust, or a sting, or something like that.

WALLACE: And instead nothing happens to you.

TOLIVER: No, the little guy in the truck puts it into a pickup truck and takes us out, and I got in a taxicab.

WALLACE: Did you get paid for the flight?

TOLIVER: Seventy-five thousand dollars.

WALLACE: Toliver's not alone. Two other men who worked in the contra supply network tell a similar story. The CIA

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denies it was involved in drug smuggling. But Congress is interested enough to invite all three to testify under oath next month.

Dan?

RATHER: Jane, why believe this man instead of the CIA?

WALLACE: In terms of his prison sentence, he seems to have nothing to gain from telling this story. In addition to that, three dozen sources confirm the basic scheme. And in addition to that, it seems as though he was a man who became expendable in a secret operation, and his only apparent motive is "get back."

RATHER: Thanks, Jane.

Now there's a lot more to this story -- a lot more. And it will be broadcast later tonight on CBS News magazine, West 57th, on most of these CBS stations at 10:00, Eastern Time, 9:00, Central.